JUST Issues

COLUMN

MONTHLY COLUMN BY CRAIG WASHINGTON

If clarity is our friend then discord may be considered a helpful acquaintance. Now let me be clear, I'm talking about polite disagreement, without the accompanying dose of shade, bile, and venom. And trust, the kids can agree to disagree with no lack of candor or honesty. We can learn so much from our "arguments" when we challenge each other without coming for one another.

Here's a perfect example. Last September, Keith Boykin (author of "One More River To Cross and former E.D. of the National Black Lesbian & Gay Leadership Forum) shared his reflections on Community-building among black lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, abd transexual folk. His remarks summoned a flurry of swift responses many of which were critical of Mr. Boykin's ideas. I have collected an impressive stack of e-mail recording this voluminous national discourse. To my surprise (what's up with my expectations?) most of the replies were respectful, however, vehemently they may have disagreed with Mr. Boykin or each other.

But it wasn't the model behavior that razzed my berry. It was the fact that so many of us were engaging each other with serious intellectual rigor. Every day for about 2 weeks, I could tap into a wide stream of exchange distilled from different styles and viewpoints. There were great strategies offered for publishing all that chitchat and making it accessible to those who are not online. It was hot.

And that made me think of Hotlanta and the possibilities here. Although there are a number of organizations that feature group discussions, what about those of us who don't like clubs or large meetings? I have heard some of the most insightful analysis about black gay folk whispered at the corner of a smoke-filled bar (I was just passing by) or shouted above some tribal house mix. While such conversations are highly valuable they can't be replicated. That clever turn of a phrase or simple profound summation is often forgotten and forever lost. Many of us can recall a departed loved one whose remarks we'd love to have written down. My good friend Duncan Teague often urges black gay men to write more, given our often apparent mortality.

So what's all this fuss about, you ask? It's a call to arms and pens and keyboards. Whether it's this new club or that lesbian erotic poetry reading; chat rooms or tea rooms; religion or regentrification we need to write more about it all, if for no reason other than to vent, its okay. You don't have to be a "writer" to write - you just need to have something to say. And you never know how your words may provide "clarity" or encouragement or amusement. You may even elicit very, shall we say, sharp counterpoints but all that, adds flavor to the mix.

Now we are blessed with Clikque, a slick glossy mag that's by, for and about us. It's not only attractive, it has substance. And it can be an ongoing public forum for us. From the comfort of our home, we can speak our mind with no inhibition. I would like to use this space to invite dialogue, debate, and of course, our helpful acquaintance "discord" which when coupled with our friend "clarity" may bring forth all kinds of revelations. In the coming months, some things I write may rub you the wrong or the right way or just plain piss you off. Whatever! If you hate stamplicking there's always e-mail. As long as you just exercise those digitals and express yourself.

Peace, CW

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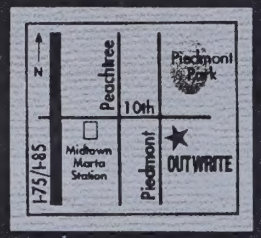

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BOOK REVIEW & SIGNING

SUBMITTED BY CINDY

NOVEMBER AUTHOR AT OUTWRITE

- Wednesday, November 11, 8 PM: Reading and signing by Pearl Cleage, What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day, Avon, $12.00. An Oprah's Book Club selection.

The debut novel by Atlanta's Pearl Cleage novel begins with Ava Johnson returning to her hometown after more than a decade with the brothers and sisters in Atlanta, which, she had been told, was the place to be if you were young, black and had any sense at all. Her fabulous career plans have been smashed by testing positive for HIV, and the once-thriving resort community she returns to is now plagued with unemployment, crime and despair. What she planned as a short family visit becomes a touchstone with her past.

Pearl Cleage is the author of Mad at Miles: A Black Woman's Guide to Truth and Deals with the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot. Her plays have been produced in such theaters as Alliance Theater Company, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Kennedy Center. Cleage is a teacher at Spellman College, co-founder of Catalyst Magazine, contributing editor of Ms. Magazine and a regular contributor to Essence Magazine. She was also the press secretary for Mayor Maynard Jackson.